

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LONDON 15604 01 OF 03 010652Z

12

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6074

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 15604

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVES HEADING FOR THEIR JAMBOREE

REF: LONDON 10973

SUMMARY. CONSERVATIVE PARTY, HEADING INTO FINAL DAYS BEFORE 1976 CONVENTION AT BRIGHTON NEXT WEEK, FACES A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES. CONFERENCE WILL, IN SOME CASES, OFFER PLATFORM AND A RESTRICTED OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTY MEMBERS TO CRITICIZE LEADERSHIP AND POLICY FORMULATION. BRIGHTON WILL BE CHALLENGE TO MRS. THATCHER'S SKILLS AND ABILITIES RATHER THAN BLACKPOOL-LIKE PAGEANT OF PRAISE AND ADULATION. END SUMMARY.

1. ONE WEEK BEFORE CONSERVATIVE ANNUAL CONFERENCE AT
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PAGE 02 LONDON 15604 01 OF 03 010652Z

BRIGHTON, THINGS ARE NOT ALL THAT ROSY. CONSERVATIVE

LEADER MARGARET THATCHER RETURNED TO BRITAIN OVER THE WEEKEND WITH MIXED REACTIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD TO HER TRIP TO PAKISTAN, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND INDIA. ALTHOUGH HER ENTOURAGE INCLUDED JOURNALISTS AND TV CAMERA CREWS, MOST OBSERVERS IN BRITAIN FELT THE TRIP WAS PERHAPS NOT WORTH IT, EXCEPT IN TERMS OF EDUCATING MRS. THATCHER AND GIVING OTHERS A LOOK AT HER. IT WAS ONLY IN AUSTRALIAN PORTION OF HER TRIP WHERE MRS. THATCHER SEEMED TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN CARRYING A POLITICAL MESSAGE AND WHERE THE COVERAGE, PARTICULARLY BY TV, SEEMED TO HAVE ANY IMPACT ON BRITISH AUDIENCES. (PRESS COVERAGE, PARTICULARLY OF HER SPEECHES, WAS CONSIDERED MINIMAL BY CENTRAL OFFICE OFFICIALS).

2. IN HER ABSENCE, CONSERVATIVE PARTY SEEMED TO BE WITHOUT A STRONG HAND ON THE TILLER. CONSERVATIVE REACTIONS TO AND COMMENT ON NOTTINGHILL RIOTS: SEEMAN'S STRIKE THREAT, CABINET CHANGES, SOUTHERN AFRICA SHUTTLE, ETC., APPEARED DELAYED AND, THEREFORE, WEAK. HEATH SEIZED THE INITIATIVE QUICKLY WITH A RESIGNED SPEECH ON DEVOLUTION BUT THE RIPPLES DIDN'T LAST LONG.

3. PERHAPS SOMEWHAT TO FILL THE VACUUM, HEAD OF THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT, ANGUS MAUDE, ANNOUNCED AT SPECIALLY CALLED PRESS CONFERENCE THAT CONSERVATIVES WOULD RELEASE STRATEGY PAPER (IN LIEU OF A POLICY DOCUMENT) IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO CONSERVATIVE CONVENTION. MAUDE'S TACTIC WAS IN A SENSE A KIND OF LEAK WHICH AT THE SAME TIME WAS CRITICIZED WITHIN THE PARTY AS BEING LESS THAN THE PARTY WANTED AND CRITICIZED BY THE PRESS EITHER AS TACTICAL OR TIMING MISTAKE. (WE HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED THAT STRATEGY PAPER WAS CLEARED BY THATCHER AND SHADOW CABINET BEFORE HER DEPARTURE ABROAD WITH IDEA OF STIMULATING MEDIA INTEREST IN CONSERVATIVE CONVENTION.)

4. MAUDE'S TACTICS MAY WELL TURN OUT TO BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. SOME JOURNALISTS HAVE REPORTED A GROWING SENSE OF DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE PARTY ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP, LACK OF DYNAMISM WITHIN THE SHADOW CABINET, AND ABSENCE OF CLEAR DEFINITION OF PARTY POLICY PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD. THIS

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PAGE 03 LONDON 15604 01 OF 03 010652Z

IS WHY IT WAS MADE CLEAR THAT THE DOCUMENT WILL BE A PAPER ON STRATEGY AND NOT POLICY. BY RELEASING IT BEFORE THE CONVENTION, PRESS WILL HAVE TIME TO CRITICIZE DOCUMENT IN ADVANCE OF CONVENTION AND ITS CONTENTS MAY ALSO SOUR FEELINGS OF CONSERVATIVE CONVENTION DELEGATES. R

5. A MEMBER OF THE SHADOW CABINET TOLD AN EMBASSY THAT THE DOCUMENT AND ITS RELEASE REPRESENTED A CALCULATED RISK. PARTY LEADERSHIP, ESPECIALLY MAUDE, ARE CON-

VINCE THAT WEEKEND PRESS PUBLICITY WILL BE BENEFICIAL
IN SECURING HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CONVENTION,
OVERRIDING CRITICAL COMMENT ON CONTENTS.

6. IN ADDITION TO DIVISIVE PROSPECTS OF THE STRATEGY
PAPER WHICH MAY DISTURB A SMOOTH CONFERENCE, IMPROVISATIO

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 LONDON 15604 02 OF 03 301541Z

12
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 LONDON 15604

REGARDING CONFERENCE SITE AND HOUSING OF DELEGATES MAY
ALSO BE A MAJOR FACTOR. WITH THE STEADY GROWTH OF SIZE
OF THE CONVENTION IN RECENT YEARS, THE CONSERVATIVES
DECIDED LAST YEAR TO RETURN TO BRIGHTON IN 1976 SINCE
IT WAS THEN ESTIMATED CONSERVATIVES WOULD BE ABLE TO
INAUGURATE A NEW CONFERENCE SITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN
BRIGHTON. LABOR DIFFICULTIES AND INFLATION HAVE COMBINED

TO DELAY COMPLETION OF THE CONFERENCE SITE, AS A RESULT OF WHICH THE CONFERENCE WILL BE JAMMED INTO EXHIBITION HALL OF METROPOLE HOTEL. REPORTEDLY CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE AT BLACKPOOL WAS MORE THAN 5,000; CAPACITY OF METROPOLE HOTEL IS ESTIMATED AT SOMETHING OVER 3,000 WITH THE OVERFILL TO BE TAKEN CARE OF IN A SEPARATE HALL EQUIPPED WITH CLOSED CIRCUIT TV. MANY ATTENDEES MAY WELL FEEL THEY COULD HAVE BEEN MORE COMFORTABLE SITTING

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PAGE 02 LONDON 15604 02 OF 03 301541Z

IN THEIR LIVING ROOMS BEFORE THEIR OWN TELLY.

7. THERE IS ONLY ONE POSSIBLE ADVANTAGE THAT BRIGHTON OFFERS. IT IS IN THE HEARTLAND OF CONSERVATIVE STRENGTH AND WITHIN CONVENIENT COMMUTING DISTANCE OF LONDON. CONFERENCE MAY, THEREFORE, BECOME VISIBLY DOMINATED BY THOSE DELEGATES WHO ARE DYED IN THE WOOL CONSERVATIVES, WITH UNDER-REPRESENTATION FROM AREAS WHERE CONSERVATIVES HOPE TO IMPROVE THEIR STANDING. CONFERENCE MAY THEREFORE BE TRADITIONALIST RATHER THAN INNOVATIVE WITHOUT INSURRECTIONARY TACTICS FROM THE FLOOR.

8. AGENDA FOR CONFERENCE NOW AVAILABLE SHOWS A TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE CHOICE OF NON-CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS FOR DEBATE (EDUCATION, EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAW AND ORDER, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, ETC.). SIGNIFICANTLY, DEVOLUTION HAS NOT BEEN SELECTED AS AGENDA TOPIC AND IT HAS BEEN ELIMINATED FROM LIST OF MOTIONS ATTENDEES CAN CHOOSE THROUGH BALLOT FOR TWO DEBATES DURING CONFERENCE. FURTHERMORE, CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS HAVE REQUIRED THAT PROSPECTIVE SPEAKERS SUBMIT TOPIC ON WHICH THEY WISH TO SPEAK IN "FREE" DEBATE ON ITEM "PEOPLE, PARLIAMENT AND THE CONSTITUTION," AND A PARTY OFFICIAL TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT DEVOLUTION WOULD NOT BE DISCUSSED. (OF ALL MOTIONS SUBMITTED BY CONSTITUENCIES, TWENTY-EIGHT OPPOSE DEVOLUTION OUTRIGHT, SOME ADDITIONAL SEVEN OR EIGHT SUPPORT DEVOLUTION WITH A CALL FOR A REFERENDUM). AT THIS TIME IT SEEMS MOST LIKELY DELEGATES MIGHT VOTE FOR DEBATE ON NORTHERN IRELAND OR RHODESIA. RECENTLY, BEFORE KISSINGER MEETINGS WITH VORSTER AND SMITH, CONSERVATIVE CONCERN OVER GOVERNMENT INACTIVITY ON RHODESIA AND SOUTH AFRICA WAS VOICED BY SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS REGINALD MAUDLING, WHO ACCUSED BRITISH GOVERNMENT OF ABDICATING ITS RESPONSIBILITIES, PARTICULARLY IN CASE OF RHODESIA, LEAVING BURDEN TO AMERICAN SECRETARY OF STATE. (PARTY OFFICIAL HINTED THAT CONFERENCE MIGHT NOT DEBATE RHODESIA MOTION BECAUSE OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND BECAUSE PARTY SENTIMENT WAS IN THE MAIN FOR THE RIGHT AND THEREFORE VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM.)

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PAGE 03 LONDON 15604 02 OF 03 301541Z

9. ANOTHER ISSUE WILL BE GIVEN SPECIAL ATTENTION INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF CONFERENCE. A MOTION ON IMMIGRATION AND RACE RELATIONS HAS BEEN SCHEDULED AND IN ADDITION WILLIAM WHITELAW WILL ADDRESS A GATHERING SPONSORED BY YOUNG CONSERVATIVES AND CONSERVATIVE STUDENTS THE EVENING BEFORE THE CONFERENCE OPENS OFFICIALLY. WHITELAW HAS ALREADY PUBLICIZED HIS VIEW THAT IMMIGRATION SHOULD BE CURTAILED AND LIMITED ONLY TO DEPENDENTS OF IMMIGRANTS ALREADY IN BRITAIN.

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PAGE 01 LONDON 15604 03 OF 03 301540Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 LONDON 15604

10. A RECENT INCIDENT IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF SOME OF THE STRESSES AND STRAINS IN THE PARTY IN THE PRE-CONFERENCE PERIOD. LORD THORNEYCROFT, CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY, HAS WITHDRAWN FROM PUBLICATION IN THE CONSERVATIVE NEWS AIMED AT CONFERENCE ATTENDEES A SPECIAL FEATURE SECTION MADE UP OF SHORT STATEMENTS BY CONSERVATIVES (MPS AND OTHERS) ABOUT THE PARTY. REPORTEDLY, HE FELT THE ARTICLES WERE CRITICAL OF THE PARTY AND ITS LEADER. THE ACTION HAS OF COURSE BEEN CRITICIZED BY OTHERS AS RESTRICTING THE FREE FLOW OF IDEAS IN A DICTATORIAL FASHION.

11. COMMENT. MRS. THATCHER WILL HAVE HER WORK CUT OUT FOR HER. A SENIOR LEVEL PARTY OFFICIAL TOLD AN EMBOFF SHE IS AWARE OF HER PERIL AND WILL BE DEVOTING A LOT
CONFIDENTIAL
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PAGE 02 LONDON 15604 03 OF 03 301540Z

OF ATTENTION TO HER SPEECH. THE CURRENT LABOR CONFERENCE IN BLACKPOOL WITH ITS DISPLAY OF DISSENSION WITHIN THE PARTY WILL BE REASSURING TO HER AND OTHER CONSERVATIVES. AT THE SAME TIME, THE FALL IN THE VALUE OF STERLING IS A BONUS IN PARTY POLITICAL TERMS.

12. WE SUSPECT THAT BRIGHTON WILL BE A FAR LIVELIER CONFERENCE THAN BLACKPOOL WAS LAST YEAR. BLACKPOOL WAS CONCEIVED AS A PAGEANT OF ADULATION FOR THE NEW LEADER WITHOUT MUCH IN THE WAY OF CONTROVERSY. BRIGHTON WILL, WE THINK, REPRESENT A TESTING OF MRS. THATCHER'S LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND ABILITIES. THERE WILL BE, OF COURSE, STRONG EFFORTS TO GLOSS OVER THE REAL CONCERNS OF PARTY MEMBERS TO CREATE A FACADE OF UNITY ON POLICY MATTERS AND ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT FOR MRS. THATCHER AND OTHER LEADERS. WE EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT THE PROPONENTS OF A STRONGER CONSERVATIVE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE WILL SUCCEED IN MAKING THEMSELVES FELT.

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